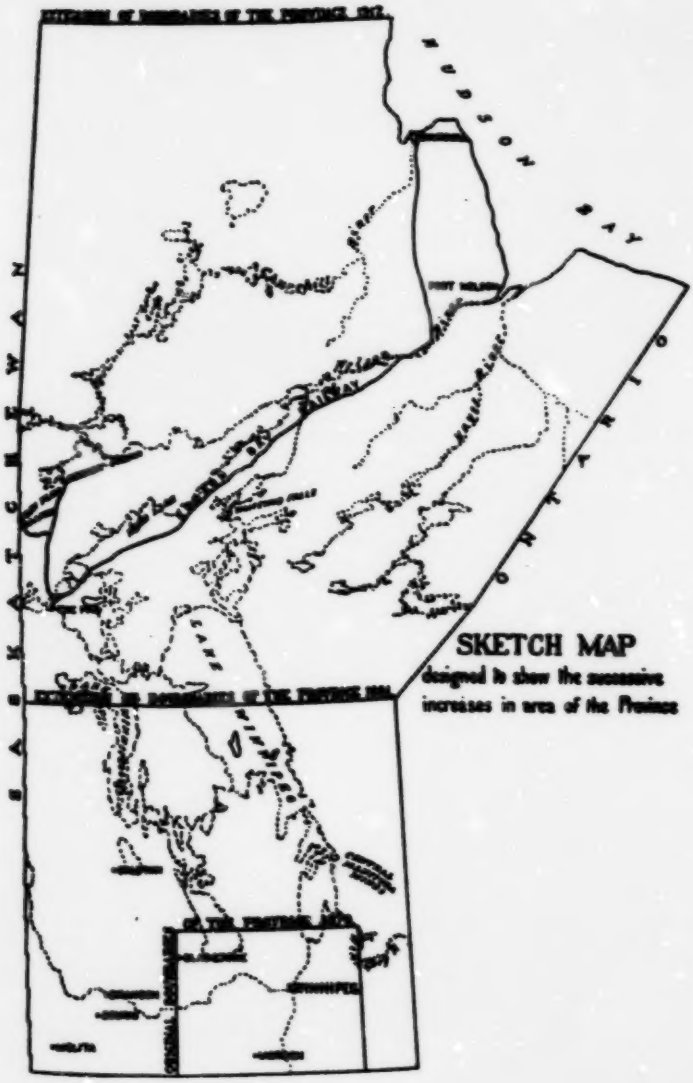

MANITOBA'S BOUNDARIES

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MANITOBA

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL
AFFAIRS AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Historic Resources Branch

Honourable Eugene Kostyra
Minister

1983

MANITOBA'S BOUNDARIES

When Manitoba entered Confederation in 1870, its total area measured only 33,280 square kilometres, or one eighteenth of its present size. Its tiny rectangular shape earned Manitoba the title of "Postage Stamp Province." The boundary extensions of 1881 and 1912 which brought the province to its present dimensions were the result of a series of complex and, at times, heated negotiations between the various levels of government within the country. The story of these negotiations is an important part of the history of this province and its people.

The Territory Prior to Confederation

The region now defined as the province of Manitoba was first included in a recognized political unit in 1670. On 2 May of that year, Charles II of England granted a substantial portion of what is now Canadian territory to the "Governor and Company of Adventurers in England Trading into Hudson's Bay." If described on a modern map, the vast trading domain of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) would have included not only Manitoba, but also those portions of Ontario and Quebec lying north of the Laurentian watershed and west of Labrador, most of

Courtesy Western Canada Pictorial Index

Land granted to Lord Selkirk in 1811, in relation to Manitoba's present boundaries

Saskatchewan, half of Alberta and a large portion of the North-West Territories. The total area of Rupert's Land, as the region was then called, measured 1,244,160 square kilometres.

Until the early nineteenth century, the HBC had little actual governing to do in that part of Rupert's Land which is now Manitoba. The population was small and sparse, and no permanent nucleus of settlement existed. The company concentrated its trading operations on Hudson Bay, letting native trappers take furs and pelts to the posts. The situation began to change in the mid-eighteenth century. Competition from free traders and the Montreal-based North West Company forced the HBC inland to establish rival posts in the heart of the fur trade territory.

By 1811, a Scottish nobleman, Thomas Douglas, Fifth Earl of Selkirk, gained a controlling interest in the HBC. Selkirk proposed a series of emigration schemes designed to assist the dispossessed Scottish crofters who had lost their lands through the "Highland Clearances" of the late eighteenth century. The London Committee of the HBC agreed to grant him a 296,960 square kilometre tract of land in the vicinity of the Red and Assiniboine rivers for an agricultural settlement. The land ceded to Selkirk for a nominal sum of ten shillings was to be henceforth known as "Assiniboia."

Between 1812 and 1814, three groups of Selkirk Settlers made their way to the junction of the Red and the Assiniboine rivers. Joined by a number of "freemen" and their Indian wives, they formed the nucleus of an agricultural colony later known as the "Red River Settlement." After Selkirk's death in 1820, the colony became the responsibility of his estate. In 1835 the HBC purchased the territory, and the administration of Assiniboia was entrusted to a governor and an appointed council. The "District of Assiniboia," over which the governor and council exercised some degree of control, spread out north and south along the Red River, and west along the Assiniboine to a distance of approximately eighty kilometres from the junction.

Over the next few decades, the role of the HBC as civil authority in the agriculture-based colony became an issue of concern. The inhabitants' growing demands for freedom of trade and responsible government coincided with the company's own desire to give up its obligation to maintain peace and administer the country. By 1869, the government of Canada had negotiated the final transfer of Rupert's Land from the HBC, and, effective 1 December 1869, it was to become responsible for the affairs of the entire North-West.

The passage of the "Act for the Temporary Government of Rupert's Land" provided for the administration of the territory. Nevertheless the actual transfer resulted in a dispute because it was negotiated without the knowledge or consultation of the inhabitants of the area. The settlers at Red River, led by Metis spokesman Louis Riel, resisted the transfer, insisting that the terms and conditions of the territory's entry into Confederation reflect the concerns and interests of its inhabitants. As the December 1869 transfer was dependent upon the "peaceable possession" of Rupert's Land, it was postponed.

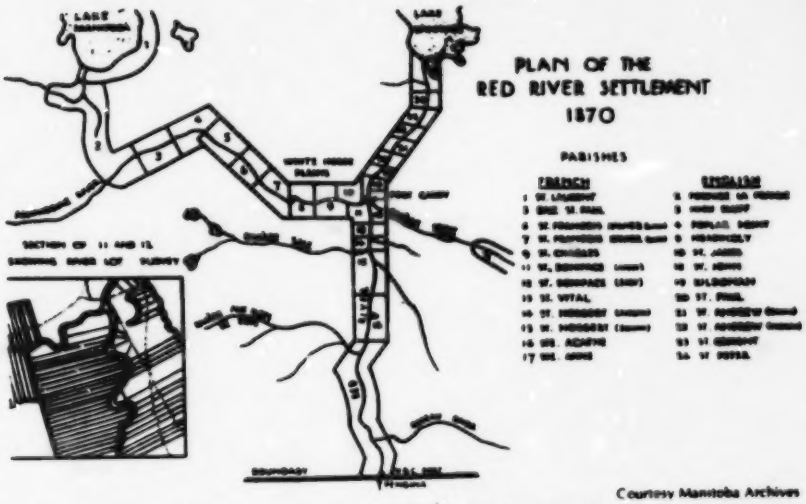
A list of rights was drawn up by a committee of delegates from

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

The District of Assiniboia, 1864, showing the extent of the land over which the Council of Assiniboia had jurisdiction

various parishes and served as the basis for negotiations with Ottawa. it reflected the inhabitants' desire to protect the lands, local traditions, languages and institutions to which they were accustomed. A revised list, greatly influenced by Riel, included a demand for provincial status and for local control of public lands and natural resources.

Three delegates from Red River were sent to Ottawa in March 1870, armed with the list of rights, to negotiate the terms and conditions surrounding the entry of the territory into confederation. During the nego-



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

The Red River Settlement, 1870, showing the locations of the twelve French and twelve English parishes.

tiations, the actual boundaries of the proposed province became a matter of debate. The Red River Settlement of 1870 included twelve English and twelve French-speaking parishes strung out along the Red and Assiniboine rivers. Somewhat apart were St. Laurent, on the southwest shore of Lake Manitoba and St. Anne along the Seine River. The final agreement, which took into account the settled area, was embodied in the "Manitoba Act." The act received Royal Assent on 12 May 1870 and was officially proclaimed on 15 July of the same year.

Among the concessions granted by virtue of the Manitoba Act were: provincial status, provisions for separate schools, a guarantee of 1,400,000 acres of land set aside for the mixed-blood population in recognition of aboriginal title to the land, a constitution similar to that of the old provinces, government by a Legislative Council and Assembly, and representation in the House of Commons. Unlike the other provinces within confederation, Manitoba was not given authority over its own public lands and natural resources. Ottawa retained control in these two areas and this later became a matter for heated debate between the two levels of government.

The tiny province created by the Manitoba Act encompassed the old District of Assiniboia, with a slight westward extension to include the growing settlement at Portage la Prairie. The area was described by Sir John A. Macdonald as beginning at a point 96° West of Greenwich (passing near Whitemouth) and extending to a point 98° 15' West of the Principal Meridian (passing near Portage la Prairie). It was bounded on the south by the 49th parallel and by latitude 50° 30' to the north. The

small "Postage Stamp Province" measured only about 33,280 square kilometres and, beyond its borders lay the vast reminder of the North-West, a territory to be governed by Ottawa.

There were obvious limitations to a province of such small dimensions, with a population of less than 12,000. The federal per capita subsidy to Manitoba was hardly sufficient for the pressing needs of a pioneer province. Ottawa's retention of land and resource control also deprived Manitoba of an important source of revenue. Ottawa's justification for maintaining resource control was a claim that the land could be better utilized "for the purposes of the Dominion." At issue, no doubt, were the building of the transcontinental railway and federal plans for western land settlement, two policies which might also explain the limited area conceded to Manitoba jurisdiction.

The First Boundary Extension

By 1873, Manitoba was actively seeking an extension of its boundaries. The provincial government determined that the province created by the Manitoba Act was not nearly sufficient to meet the needs of a growing population. This factor, along with a desire for port facilities on Lake Superior or Hudson Bay, and the pressing need for a larger provincial income through control of natural resources, formed the basis of the expansionists' demands. The provincial government dispatched representatives to Ottawa in March of 1873 to present its claims. The request, if agreed to by Ottawa, would have increased the size of the province to 768,000 square kilometres and would also have given Manitoba potential port facilities on both Hudson Bay and Lake Superior. A change in the federal administration resulted in the proposal being shelved, and Manitoba was left unchanged.

In the meantime, the question of Ontario's western boundary became a political issue. In 1871 the Ontario government asked the Dominion to join with it in appointing a commission to define the western and northern boundaries of that province. By August of 1874, after a series of setbacks the Commission submitted its report, recommending that the boundary between Manitoba and Ontario follow the meridian passing through the North-West Angle of the Lake of the Woods. A committee of arbiters was appointed to make the final decision, but the change of government in 1878 resulted in their recommendations being ignored. Consequently, the matter remained unresolved for a number of years.

Manitoba expansionists received their first major setback in 1875, when Parliament passed an act granting the North-West Territories a government distinct from that of Manitoba. Until that time, other districts from the Territories could have been added to the province without disturbing the machinery of either government. The new distinction between the provincial government of Manitoba and the government of the North-West Territories made territorial annexation much more difficult.

The campaign for boundary extension continued throughout the 1870s. A minor adjustment, which took into account the township lines

Manitoba in 1881, in relation to future provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

in the realignment of the western boundary, was granted in 1877. The change occurred after the land survey was completed when it was discovered that the original border actually dissected farm holdings in the margins of the province. The new boundary was moved a few miles west to the nearest township lines, and this accounts for the jagged appearance of the western border of the province.

Between 1876 and 1881, ten thousand people settled in the area just beyond the reaches of the province. Their demands for representative government added another dimension to the boundary issue. Within the province itself, the population had blossomed to 65,954 by 1881. The increased numbers created a strain on the financial resources of the province and re-opened the debate on federal control of Manitoba's natural resources and public lands. The province maintained that population growth necessitated greater provincial income through resource control and more land through the extension of Manitoba's boundaries.

When the federal election of 1878 returned John A. Macdonald's Conservatives to power, the provincial government again dispatched a delegation to Ottawa seeking a solution to the issue of expansion. Both sides agreed that an extension was necessary if the province was to keep

up with those settlers who had gone beyond Brandon in the west, and those who inhabited the New Iceland settlement to the north. Finally, the negotiations for boundary extension were concluded and on 23 December 1881, the act was proclaimed.

Although the boundary extension of 1881 did not match the original demands of the provincial government, it did expand the area of the province to 189,327 square kilometres, or to five times its original size. The boundaries were set in the west at the twenty-ninth range of townships, which is Manitoba's present western border, in the north at 53° latitude or south of Grand Rapids, and in the east at the "western boundary of Ontario." The latter definition was, of course, confusing as Ontario's western border had remained in dispute since 1874.

Manitoba readily accepted the 1881 boundary extension and quickly established its legislative authority over the new addition. The government divided the "new" province into electoral districts and proceeded to consolidate its holdings in the revamped provincial legislature. Still at issue was the area known as Rat Portage (today's Kenora) which fell into the disputed area of Ontario's boundary claim.

The delineation of Ontario's western extremities had always been somewhat questionable due to poor or incorrect mapping and ambiguous wording on official documents. These discrepancies led to the debate over whether or not Ontario's western boundary should be drawn near Port Arthur, due north of the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, or near Rat Portage, on the line drawn north of the North-West Angle of the Lake of the Woods.

Ontario maintained that, based on the boundaries established by the Quebec Act of 1774, its western border should be drawn in accordance with a line extending north from the source of the Mississippi which ran just one hundred and twenty-nine kilometres east of Winnipeg. In August of 1881, Manitoba also laid claim to the controversial area, maintaining that Ontario's border was as far east as Port Arthur. The Dominion government sought to mediate between the two through the Supreme Court but Ontario refused and, in March of 1882, its provincial government attempted to establish authority over the disputed area.

The boundary dispute was further complicated with the arrival of Ontario lumbermen into the area during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the early 1880s. The granting of timber leases was a partisan issue over which the federal Conservatives and the Ontario Liberals were bound to disagree. At the centre of the debate was the question of who actually held the land rights — Ontario, which managed its own lands and resources, or the federal government, which maintained control of Manitoba's lands. Gold, too, had been discovered at Rat Portage and there was a question of jurisdiction over the royalties.

The inhabitants of Rat Portage found themselves highly sought after and encouraged both parties. During 1882-83, the town was incorporated by both Manitoba and Ontario. Each province proclaimed its laws in force in the district, built a courthouse, a jail and appointed their own magistrates and constables. The effects of this duplication of services were confusing, to say the least. Prisoners arrested and jailed by

Courtesy of Manitoba Archives

The Manitoba Jail at Rat Portage, 1883.

the authorities of one province were released by the other, while the constables who made the arrests were themselves arrested by the policemen of the other province. One of the more noteworthy incidents was the storming and burning of the Manitoba jail by its rival's loyal citizens.

In July of 1883, the Manitoba legislature amended its 1881 boundary extension act, allowing for a representative from the disputed area to sit in the legislature. Attorney-General James Millar was the first and only representative elected to the Manitoba legislature from the constituency of Varennes. At this point, the inhabitants of Rat Portage could boast of having not only two organizations of municipal government but of also having representation on two different provincial legislatures.

The issue of dual representation finally brought the dispute to a head in 1883. The respective attorneys-general of both Ontario and Manitoba met and agreed to allow the Privy Council to settle the dispute. The decision passed down in 1884 upheld Ontario's claims, but it was not implemented until 1889 when the Dominion fixed the boundary at the North-West Angle.

Expansion Northward

The boundary debate remained relatively calm until the early twentieth century. The expansion of the railway system and the increased influx of settlers prompted the Manitoba legislature to renew its bid for extended provincial boundaries. In 1901 a resolution was passed in the Manitoba legislature to ask the federal Parliament to allow for the extension of the boundaries to Hudson Bay. As eastward expansion had been categorically denied, the provincial government also suggested that the western boundary be extended.

The following year, Premier Roblin approached Premier Haultain of the North-West Territories to discuss the possibility of westward expansion. The people of Assiniboia, just beyond Manitoba's western border, did not welcome the proposal. They did not want to share the burden of Manitoba's increasing deficit, and felt that they could probably exact better terms from the federal government on their own. So final was their refusal that westward expansion was all but ruled out. The Manitoba government's final hopes were dashed in 1905, when the Laurier government created the two new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Manitoba quickly revised its claims for territorial expansion to the north. Encouraged by the building activities of the Canadian Northern and the Hudson Bay railways, the province hoped to tap the riches of the opening frontier. The demands for the northward expansion of Manitoba's boundaries fared little better than the western proposal. Indeed, counter claims by Ontario for the extension of its western border directly north to Hudson Bay compounded the difficulties. The Roblin government also charged that the position of Manitoba's Official Opposition was detrimental to the hopes of expansion. In allegiance with the Liberal government in Ottawa, Manitoba's Liberals had gone on record as being willing to accept a much smaller portion of territory than that claimed by the Conservative government.

In 1908, the campaign for the extension of the northern boundary took a positive turn. Wilfrid Laurier, Canada's Prime Minister, introduced a boundary extension bill in Parliament which would have increased Manitoba's western boundary north up to the 60° north latitude and its eastern boundary to the point at which the 89° west longitude cut the shore of Hudson Bay. The possibility of Laurier exacting a final settlement was largely thwarted by the federal election of 1911.

The defeat of Laurier and the return of Borden's Conservatives to power generally assured Manitoba expansionists of their extension. Borden's promise to extend the boundaries upon his election helped to guarantee the Conservative leader eight out of ten federal seats in the province. On 15 May 1912, the Manitoba legislature passed an act calling for the "Further Extension" of the provincial boundaries. The proposal recommended by Laurier in 1908 became the final settlement for the boundary question.

This last extension added 458,291 square kilometres to the province and increased its population by 6,000 people. Though it was heralded as

Courtesy Western Canada Pictorial Index

Manitoba in 1912 when the final boundary extension brought the province to its present size

Manitoba's "coming of age," the final scene in this drama did not take place until July 1930 when the federal government finally granted Manitoba control of its own public lands and natural resources.

After a long and hard-fought battle, the final boundary extension and the much delayed granting of resource control by the federal government in 1930, eventually brought Manitoba into a position of equality with its peers in Confederation.

Suggestions for Further Reading

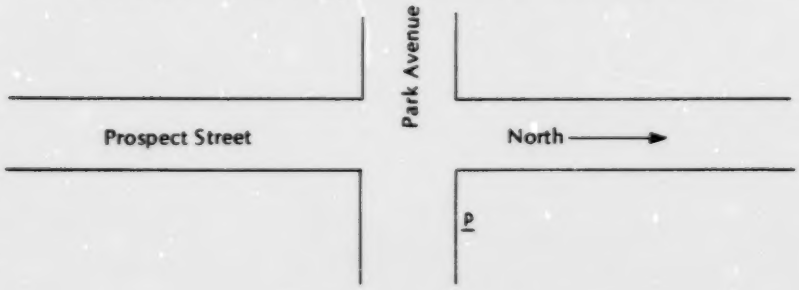
The various stages in the development of Manitoba's boundaries are discussed in most secondary sources dealing with the history of the province, including James A. Jackson, *The Centennial History of Manitoba* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1970); W.L. Morton, *Manitoba A History,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957); F.H. Schofield, *The Story of Manitoba, Vol. I,* (Winnipeg: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1913). Another valuable source for this study is Don W. Thomson, *Men and Meridians, Vol. II,* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967).

Credits

The cover photograph of the map of Manitoba and the boundary extensions of 1881 and 1912 is printed courtesy of the Manitoba Archives.

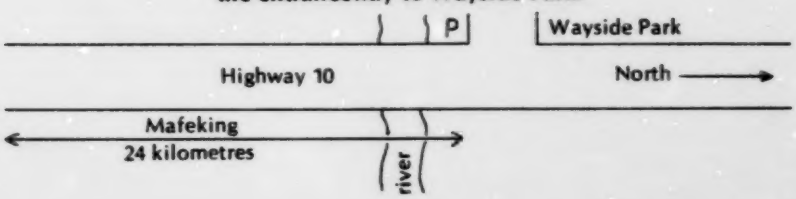
POSTAGE STAMP PROVINCE
Here ran the original north boundary of the Province of Manitoba. On July 15, 1870 Manitoba officially became a Canadian province. It then measured about 130 miles east to west and 110 miles north to south, with an area of 13,928 square miles. Its size and shape gave it the nick-name "the Postage Stamp Province." Boundaries were extended in 1881 and 1912.
THE HISTORIC SITES ADVISORY BOARD
OF MANITOBA

This plaque is located in the community of Winnipeg Beach



NORTHERN MANITOBA 1912-1962
RED DEER RIVER
In 1912 the northern boundary of Manitoba was extended from a point two miles south of here to the 60th parallel of latitude. This acquisition of 178,000 square miles gave the Province an ocean coast line on Hudson Bay, new resources in forests, minerals and water power, and reunited the old north of the fur trade with the new south of agricultural settlement.
THE HISTORIC SITES ADVISORY BOARD
OF MANITOBA

This plaque is located just off Highway No. 10 at the entranceway to Wayside Park.



NORTHERN MANITOBA 1912-1962
GRAND RAPIDS
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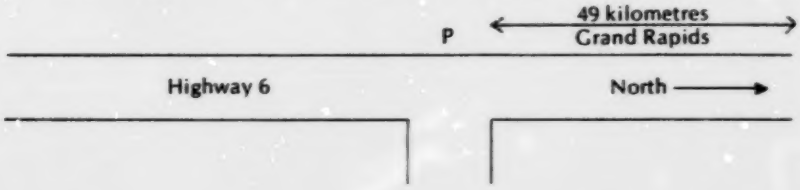
THE HISTORIC SITES ADVISORY BOARD
OF MANITOBA

This plaque is located on Highway No. 6, south of Grand Rapids.



OUR HERITAGE

We have received great gifts as our heritage in Canada — beautiful rivers and parks, rolling hills, trees and grassland, the rich resources of nature are ours to protect, cherish and enjoy.

Wherever man has been, there are marks of defilement and destruction — let us resolve that this shall not be our legacy to the twenty-first century. Let us rather honour and emulate those who went before us as pioneers, who gave of themselves, building and creating, enriching the land. They have earned our thanks, and while we cannot repay them, we can respect their achievements and resolve that we will try to follow them in action and in attitude.

For this we set aside this special place in our Province, a site that is part of history.